



UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

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GENERAL GOVERNMENT
DIVISION

APRIL 15, 1980

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✓The Honorable Ronald C. Marlenee
House of Representatives

Dear Mr. Marlenee:

Subject: [Postal Carrier Route Studies, *DLG04354*
Great Falls, Montana] (GGD-80-55)

In response to your October 2, 1979, request, we have reviewed postal carrier route studies made by the Postal Service in Great Falls, Montana. You were concerned that the studies appeared to have many errors which would affect adjustments made to the letter carriers' routes.

Our review confirmed that the studies contained many errors which collectively cast doubt on the accuracy and validity of the studies and could have affected route adjustments. However, as discussed with your office, we did not review any of the route adjustments because new route studies will be made this month.

We examined 26 of the 56 route studies made by the Postal Service in March and April 1979 in Great Falls, Montana. Our review included routes for the main post office and for the C.M. Russell station--the only locations involved in the studies.

Carrier route studies are to be made from the following information:

- Mail volume and worktime information for 1 inspection week.
- An 8-week average of the time used by the carrier to process and deliver mail. The 8-week average is based on 7 randomly selected weeks and the 1 week following the week of inspection.

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--Observations made by a Postal Service supervisor of the carrier's performance on 1 day during the inspection week.

STUDIES CONTAINED MANY ERRORS

Our examination of 50 percent (28 of 56) of the route studies revealed many errors which collectively could have affected route adjustments. The errors also created an atmosphere of antagonism and distrust between Postal Service management officials and some of the letter carriers.

Some of the errors we found during our review were as follows.

- For the 28 route studies examined, some of the weeks used to average mail processing and delivery times were not accurately recorded. For example, documentation for one study showed that the week used began on January 20, 1979. The week actually used, however, began on January 27, 1979. Another study did not contain supporting documentation for 1 of the weeks used.
- For all route studies the 7 random weeks used to compute the 8-week average of a carrier's actual mail processing and delivery times were improperly selected. The national labor contract between the Postal Service and National Association of Letter Carriers provides a procedure for the random selection of weeks which was not completely followed.
- For nine studies, the average time to process and deliver mail was computed on the basis of less than 8 weeks. For example, one route study used an average based on 5 weeks, because the carrier was on leave for 3 of the weeks selected.
- Because the carriers were on leave part of a day, studies for three routes used partial days, which distorted the computation of average delivery times.

- Studies for 9 of the 28 routes used incorrect mail processing or delivery times. These errors occurred because of incorrect entries into the computer.
- The correct mail processing time (base office time) was not always used. The base office time should be the lower of a pre-established standard time or the average time used during the week of inspection. Our examination of base office time calculations showed that three of nine studied had not used the correct base office time.

In addition, forms used to document the justification for adjustments to a carrier's route were usually completed in pencil and erasures on the documents were evident. Also, in some instances, the justifications used to support adjustments were not clearly stated. These practices created suspicion among some letter carriers that Postal Service management had tampered with some of the studies.

Instructions on how the studies are to be made are in the Postal Service manual entitled "Management of Delivery Services" and in the current contract with the National Association of Letter Carriers. These instructions apparently failed to provide adequate guidance for

- selecting the proper weeks for computing average time,
- determining the base office time for carriers, and
- determining the proper course of action for situations when carriers were on leave entire weeks or partial days and when a carrier's timecard did not reflect required entries.

The Great Falls postmaster believes that errors in selecting and averaging the proper weeks may be occurring elsewhere because of inadequate instructions. In addition, he said that the studies were initiated under an acting supervisor who was detailed for 6 weeks to Washington, D.C., midway through the study period. Other Postal Service supervisors assumed his role during his absence, which resulted in some confusion and inconsistencies in making the studies.

NEW STUDIES WILL BE MADE

In our discussion of the study errors, the Great Falls postmaster, the customer service manager, and the acting manager of mail processing agreed with the results of our review and plan to assure that future studies are properly done. New route studies are scheduled to begin on April 19, 1980.

In assuring us that future studies in Great Falls would be more accurate, the postmaster said that for the April 1980 studies, Postal Service supervisors and a union representative will select the proper weeks for averaging. In addition, the weeks selected will be recorded in greater detail, such as by pay period and by the inclusive standard Saturday-to-Friday workweek.

We were also told that the postmaster or customer service manager will provide all guidance and control over staff involved in the upcoming studies. The following guidance will be given to the staff:

--The base office time used will be the lower of a pre-established standard time or the average time used during the week of inspection.

--Documents supporting study results will be prepared in ink. All changes will be lined through and initialed by the person(s) making the change.

--If the regular carrier did not serve the route on at least 1 day of a selected week or if conditions during a selected week were obviously abnormal (e.g., the regular carrier worked short days), the staff will use the next available week (before or after the abnormal week) in which conditions were normal.

--At least two supervisors will verify all time data to be processed by computer before entry.

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As agreed with your office, we will provide a copy of this report to the Great Falls postmaster; the manager/postmaster of the Management Sectional Center in Billings, Montana; and to management officials at Postal Service Headquarters in Washington, D.C.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "AR Voss". The letters are dark and fluid, with a prominent loop at the end of the last name.

Allen R. Voss
Director